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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001405

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SUBJECT: GOVERNOR KALU EVALUATES HIS PRESIDENTIAL PROSPECTS
AND POLITICAL SCENE

REF: LAGOS 607

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with the Consul General on November 19, Abia State Governor Orji Kalu discussed his plans for the Presidency. Kalu confessed the PDP nomination was a lost cause due to President Obasanjo's antipathy, thus Kalu would not bother to seek the People's Democratic Party (PDP) presidential nomination, but would run under another party's banner. Even in another party, Kalu saw himself as a Presidential long-shot but definitely as Vice-Presidential material for former heads-of-state Ibrahim Babangida, Muhammadu Buhari, or Vice-President Abubakar Atiku. Kalu predicted Obasanjo would again seek to extend his tenure. Kalu warned civil disturbance or military intervention could be the result of such an Obasanjo misstep. End summary.

The EFCC Charges Fail to Implicate Kalu

¶2. (C) In a meeting with the Consul General on November 19, Abia State Governor Orji Kalu discussed his electoral plans. Kalu said President Obasanjo continues to try to strangle him by using the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Kalu stated the EFCC went after his mother and other close associates to implicate him, but the case has collapsed and EFCC efforts were ultimately futile.

Kalu Will Run for President Outside the PDP

¶3. (C) Kalu would not bother to seek the PDP presidential nomination. It would be an exercise in futility given the level of acrimony between him and Obasanjo. Kalu has been making arrangements to jump from the PDP to join his supporters who have already switched parties. However, Kalu did not mention the party to which he will ultimately flee. Kalu mentioned he continued to talk to Ibrahim Babangida and Muhammadu Buhari, as well as Vice-President Abubakar Atiku.

Presidential Dark-horse but Vice-Presidential Darling

¶4. (C) Evaluating his own chances, Kalu thinks he is a presidential dark-horse but a Vice-Presidential darling. Kalu stated that he and Buhari and Babangida have been courting each other assiduously. He predicted something would come of one of these dalliances. Also, he maintained close contact with Vice-President Atiku as a third option.

Obasanjo Rapprochement with Ekwueme Unlikely

¶5. (C) Despite a press statement of a brewing rapprochement between the PDP hierarchy and former Vice-President Alex Ekwueme, Kalu said nothing will come of it. He stated that the urbane Ekwueme continued to seethe inwardly at how President Obasanjo robbed him of the PDP presidential nomination in both 1999 and 2003. Ekwueme would like nothing better than to exact revenge and get the last laugh, Kalu asserted. Thus, Kalu stated he is in close communication with Ekwueme about how to mobilize the Igbo southeast against Obasanjo.

Political Scene as Tense as Kalu Can Remember

¶6. (C) Overall, Kalu commented the Nigerian political scene was as tense and as complicated as any he could remember. Kalu still believed Obasanjo would try to prolong his tenure.

While Kalu did not discount reintroduction of a constitutional amendment he thought it more likely Obasanjo would cite electoral problems as the rationale for tenure extension. Kalu stated if Obasanjo used this ruse, eruption of civil disturbance was distinctly possible. Kalu also stated that many politicians have been engaged in anti-Obasanjo talk with key elements in the military. If Obasanjo sought to extend, Kalu measured it a toss-up whether the military would intervene at that point.

¶7. (C) Comment: Kalu was as brash and confident as ever, but practical enough to realize he did not have a chance in

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the PDP. Kalu sees greener pastures elsewhere. While a longshot as President he could have appeal as a Vice-President because of his long-time and unwavering criticism of Obasanjo. However Kalu's chances for either slot are not very good due to the perception of poor performance as Governor during his second term. If Obasanjo tries to extend tenure, expect Kalu to be as vocal as anyone in opposition, in hopes his garrulousness will increase his electoral stock with the Nigerian public. End comment.

BROWNE